



Henderson Police Officer
Justin Rutledge

ABBIE DARST | PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Hailing from Posey County, Ind., where he says they grow the best watermelons, 25-year-old Justin Rutledge has spent the past three years working a job he always wanted to do in a place he never thought he'd be. After applying for an opening at Henderson Police Department, just to gain the experience of the process, he was hired, and his consistent efforts and positive attitude have been an asset to the department ever since. Rutledge has been married for just over a year and is finishing his bachelor's degree at the University of Southern Indiana in criminal justice and police administration. Currently on third shift, Rutledge still enjoys serving warrants and making arrests, but says he loves meeting new people and building relationships first and foremost in his career.

I knew Henderson conducted a full-process interview — it lasted about eight months. My goal was to make it to the interview; I wanted to sit in and get feel for what it was like. But I knew I wouldn't get the job here because I didn't know anybody. I made it through each process and got to interview. It was intimidating. There were five or six of them and just me in a chair, but it went well. I was waiting for my Dear John letter, but instead received one that said I had moved on.

Between Kentucky and Indiana, the states didn't matter to me, I just didn't want to police at home for my first gig in law enforcement — that was big for me. I'm still not sure I want to go home and be the police. I really value the fact that I can leave this city and drive home. We live in a pretty tight-knit community in Indiana, and they know I'm a police officer, but not for them in their community.

In addition, I wanted to learn in an unbiased environment. I didn't know anyone in Henderson and I didn't go to school with anyone's kids. I don't owe anybody any favors; they don't owe me any favors.

When I think of why I wanted to go into law enforcement, there's always the

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cliché answer, 'Because I want to help people,' which I did. But my big thing is I wanted to be someone people in the community could go to and look up to. It's kind of funny because half of the people in community run from you. But there are a lot of people out there, especially in the younger generation, who need someone to look up to. I would hope that I help them. Kids see us in a bad light sometimes when we're going to arrest mom or dad, or both. But I try to hang around and talk to the kids and explain to them that we are not bad guys.

I had friends who were police officers, and I did ride alongs every weekend. Those really helped me. I remember one of the interview questions asked was what do you expect to be doing as an officer, and I said, 'Paperwork and trying to stay awake.' I don't think anyone else answered that way. But I had done so many ride alongs that I knew the job was not what you see on TV. Those ride alongs helped me understand the job, know what to do and what was expected. My friend wasn't kicking in doors every night. I get to do that some, and it's exciting — but those times are few and far between.

The work on second shift I loved. You never know what you'll get on second shift. But it's a terrible shift to have a life. Working 2 to 10 p.m. — not only did I not see my wife, I didn't see anybody. The only family were the guys on my shift, and we were all too tired to hang out.

Third shift is different. It is a lot more self-initiated — serving warrants, stopping people, checking businesses. Our calls tend to be more serious. Last winter I was just coming to work and a call came out for a stabbing. It was in my area, so I took off. When I arrived, there

was a car parked diagonally in the street, and a woman was laying on the curb, bleeding from her mouth and nose, and her body was riddled with holes. She'd been stabbed 37 times. She'd filed for divorce a week prior. He had called her and wanted a ride, giving her some boo-hoo story. But he ended up stabbing her and trying to kill her on the drive.

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Our bars here will actually call us — if they feel like they have a rowdy crowd — to do a walk through. To me, we've made great strides there. Used to be, they didn't want us around, but now they are calling us to come walk thought their bar. I enjoy getting to talk to people and letting them know we're real people. There is such a misconception. People have no idea what we really do; though everybody *thinks* they know what we do and why we do it.

My shift as a whole is pretty tight and we get along great. Sometimes shifts just don't, people clash. I try to maintain a positive attitude all the time. That gets hard to do sometimes when working days off and overtime, but I like to go out and do my job. I've always said, 'I don't care what I'm doing, I'm going to have fun doing it.' Obviously it's not gravy all the time, but I'm going to enjoy my job. Even in hard times, if you stay positive it goes a long way and spreads to others.

Sometimes there are things you don't want to do, but if you put on a smile and do it, that helps boost the shift, too. If you have one guy that wants to gripe and complain and everyone else is smiling at him, it's hard to keep complaining. 🍷

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